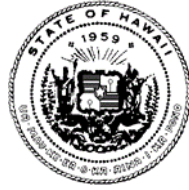


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 19, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 237 HD1 – RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS.**

Hearing: February 21, 2025, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of the measure, defers to the Department of Health, and provides comments. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: This bill appropriates funds for the Family Health Services Division of the Department of Health to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs for children from birth to age five and their families, including the establishment of program specialist positions. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The Committees of Health and Human Services & Homelessness amended this measure by:

- (1) Changing the appropriation and position counts to unspecified amounts; and
- (2) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion.

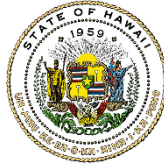
Peer support or peer-to-peer support programs for families with young children increase the exchange of information amongst parents with shared experiences and reduce

February 19, 2025

Page 2

social isolation. School- and community-based Family Resource Centers may serve as places where peer-to-peer support programs can exist to assist families in their community where they feel comfortable and amenable to seeking information and assistance. The positive outcomes of well-supported peer-to-peer support programs are that participants feel more confident about their parenting, they have support accessing services, they increase social connections, and their children gain access to care and have fewer unmet needs. These outcomes are protective factors that reduce risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'āina
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 237, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS.

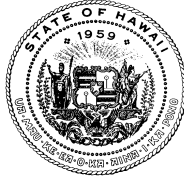
Committee: FIN
Date: Friday, February 21, 2025
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 308

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **COMMENTS**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) supports the intent of H.B. No. 237, H.D. 1 which establishes positions and appropriates funds for peer-to-peer support programs. We defer to the Department of Health (DOH) regarding implementation and funding and offer the following comments.

Peer-to-peer support programs provide opportunities for parents and families to support each other, learn effective parenting practices together, and connect with available resources and social services. These programs strengthen families and promote the well-being of our keiki. The EOEL is in support of expanding state funding for peer-to-peer programs because they enhance family engagement and support – key elements of a successful early learning system.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued investment in our youngest keiki and their families and thank you for the opportunity to share these comments.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 237 H.D. 1
RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

REPRESENTATIVE KYLE T. YAMASHITA, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: 02/21/2025, 2:00 PM, CR 308

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The proposed measure appropriates funds to the Department of Health
2 (“Department”) and the establishment of two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) program specialist
3 positions. The Department requests that this measure be considered as a vehicle to provide this
4 needed funding so long as it does not supplant the priorities and requests outlined in the
5 Governor’s executive budget request.

6 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure.

7 **Department Testimony:** The Family Health Services Division (FHSD) provides the following
8 testimony on behalf of the Department.

9 Offering expectant and new parents family strengthening programs using a peer-to-peer
10 support framework is proven to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect and improve positive
11 parenting outcomes. Reestablishing this program in the Department will help strengthen
12 current community-based peer-to-peer support programs and expand resources focusing on
13 addiction/recovery and child welfare peer-to-peer-supports.

14 **Offered Amendments:** None.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



Our Mission

Increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



Steering Committee

City and County of Honolulu

Justina Acevedo-Cross
Greg Auberry
Chiyomi Chow
Kanoë Enos
JoAnn Farnsworth
Jordana Ferreira
Nadia Garcia
Danny Goya
Alex Harris
Sakinah Harrison
Erin Henderson
Monique Ibarra
Shawn Kana'iaupuni
Ryan Kusumoto
Ka'iulani Laehā
Lynelle Marble
Megan McCorrison
Marty Oliphant
Cherilyn Shiinoki
Laurie Tochiki
Sunshine Topping
Kerrie Urosevich
Carol Wear
S. Kukunaokalā Yoshimoto

Maui County

Ka'ina Bonacorisi
Kawika Mattos
Bobbie-Jo Moniz-Tadeo

Kaua'i County

Sarah Blane
Alice Luck

Hawai'i County

Sulma Gandhi
Kahi Moreman
Angela Thomas



Contact Info

700 Bishop Street, Suite 1701
Honolulu, Hawai'i 93813

info@committokeiki.org
CommitToKeiki.org

Date: February 21, 2025

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Commit to Keiki

RE: House Bill 237 HD1, Relating to Peer Support Programs

Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan, public-private collaborative to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, Commit to Keiki's mission is to increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to early childhood.

Commit to Keiki strongly supports passage of House Bill 237 HD1, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

As noted in the measure's preamble, a lack of necessary supports for parents and families can—and often will—result in negative outcomes that can include depression, mental health challenges, intimate partner violence, substance abuse and addiction, and child abuse and neglect. Challenges like these can manifest in significant and lasting trauma for children, and Commit to Keiki will continue to advocate for programs and initiatives that provide parents with the critical supports they need to lessen the likelihood of these outcomes occurring.

Peer-to-peer support programs connect parents and/or families with other parents/or families who have experienced similar parenting, mental health and/or substance addiction challenges. This results in higher rates of trust, program retention and ongoing support. Peer-to-peer support programs provide parents and families with a safe place to be supporter on best parenting practices, obtain necessary screening and referrals, and access critical resources. The overall positive effect this can have for families and children cannot be overstated. And—with 58% of children in Hawai'i already made vulnerable by family violence, substance abuse, divorce, and incarceration—the need for social programs like the one proposed by HB237 HD1 should not be underestimated.

From a strictly economic perspective, the benefits of establishing peer-to-peer programs are extremely straightforward. As a society, we understand clearly that early investment in the health and development of our community's youngest people pays dividends over the long run, and conservative estimates have identified the total lifetime economic burden created by child abuse to be roughly \$2.6 billion here in

Hawai'i. Investment in programs and professionals like the ones proposed by this measure represent the likely saving of millions of dollars in future interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of negative childhood experiences.

For these reasons, Commit to Keiki strongly supports HB237 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



Date: February 20, 2025

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

RE: House Bill 237, Relating to Peer Support Programs

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) brings together diverse stakeholders including government and non-government organizations to improve the systems of care for Hawaii's youngest keiki. Our mission is to provide backbone supports to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight and to strengthen and integrate early childhood systems through streamlining services, maximizing resources and improving programs to support our youngest keiki.

Because House Bill 237 creates an avenue for life experience to become a career in helping our most vulnerable keiki and parents **we are in strong support**. **ECAS strongly supports passage of House Bill 237**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

Peer-to-peer support programs have been shown to be extremely effective in improving outcome of children and families when utilized compared to more traditional programming for vulnerable families. **Peer support decreases child abuse, while saving money**. This effectiveness is measured through higher rates of trust, program retention and less interaction with the judicial and child welfare systems. These programs provide families with a safe place to learn healthy parenting practices, obtain necessary screening and referrals, and access resources. The overall positive effect this can have for families and children cannot be overstated. With the statistic of 58% of Hawaii's children experiencing family violence, substance abuse, divorce, and incarceration, the need for social programs like the one proposed by HB237 should not be underestimated.

Early investment in health and development of our community's youngest people pays dividends. Conservative estimates show the total lifetime economic burden created by child abuse to be \$2.6 billion in Hawaii. From an economic perspective, the establishment of peer-to-peer programs is a no-brainer to improve outcomes for keiki and parents, saving Hawaii millions of dollars in judicial and child welfare costs by mitigating the effects of negative childhood experiences.

For ECAS House Bill 237 (HB237) is also exciting to support because it helps Hawaii in the following "Big Picture" ways:

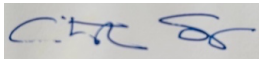
- HB237 meets several goals set forth in the Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan
- HB237 helps Hawaii meet the Recommendations of the Trauma-Informed Care Task Force
- HB237 helps Hawaii provide evidence-based methods of tackling negative childhood experiences

-
- HB237 meets the Recommendations of the Malama Ohana Working Group to improve the Child Welfare System

For these reasons, Early Childhood Action Strategy strongly supports HB237.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Aloha nui,



Christina Simmons, MPH, IBCLC (emeritus),

Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan Coordinator, ECAS

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Matthew Lorin
Chair, Board of Directors
Family Hui Hawaii

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

As Chair of the Board of Family Hui Hawaii, I can speak directly to the fiscal prudence and cost-effectiveness of peer-to-peer support programs. This is an investment that not only benefits families but also ensures responsible stewardship of public funds by reducing long-term financial burdens on the state. Parenting is a deeply personal, yet inherently communal, experience. When families have access to low-cost, high-impact peer networks, they are better equipped to navigate the challenges of raising children—ultimately reducing reliance on expensive state services.

Peer-to-peer programs are a proven best practice in cost-effective prevention. They reduce public expenditures by preventing child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and substance use disorders—issues that, if left unaddressed, result in significantly higher costs. According to national research, every \$1 invested in early intervention and support services saves \$7 in downstream costs, including child welfare interventions such as foster care and family court proceedings, healthcare expenses related to mental health, emergency care, special education services for children impacted by trauma, and criminal justice costs due to intergenerational cycles of neglect and violence.

With an estimated \$2.6 billion economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect in Hawai'i, failing to fund preventative measures like peer-to-peer programs only perpetuates long-term financial strain on the state budget. The \$860,000 appropriation in HB237 represents a modest but highly strategic investment that will pay for itself many times over by alleviating the need for far costlier state-funded interventions. Unlike traditional service delivery models that require significant overhead and administrative costs, peer-based support systems are scalable, adaptable, and inherently cost-efficient. Once community-based networks are established, they continue to operate at low cost while providing long-term benefits.

By acting now, the Legislature has the opportunity to make a sound financial decision—one that prevents crises before they happen, reduces taxpayer burden, and ensures that funds are used in the most efficient way possible. HB237 is not just a moral imperative—it is a fiscally responsible measure that aligns with Hawai'i's commitment to effective, cost-conscious governance. Investing in early, community-based intervention is one of the most financially prudent decisions the state can make.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to pass this bill.

Respectfully,



Matthew Lorin
Chair, Board of Directors
Family Hui Hawaii



2345 Nuuanu Avenue #15 Honolulu, Hawaii 96817
<https://familyhuihawaii.org>

February 5, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Dear Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance,

On behalf of Family Hui Hawai'i, I would like to provide our strong support for House Bill 237 HD1 that would appropriate funds to the Department of Health Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

In August 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a nationwide advisory describing our nation's families under extreme levels of parental stress, the consequences resulting in increased risk of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect and chronic health diseases, as well as recommendations for peer-to-peer support programs as an effective strategy to address it. Peer-to-peer programs connect families through meaningful shared lived experiences which allow families to learn from each other and build a sense of belonging, resulting in strong relationships that become their network of support in times of need. Agencies that provide the framework, coordination of groups, and training for the peer leaders provide the support and evidence informed content that ensures the effectiveness of the programs.

This bill provides support for the continuum of prevention strategies, broad-based for all families to tertiary intervention for higher needs for families with children during their most critical period of brain development, prenatal to age 5 years, when the foundations of executive functions needed for success in school and life are formed. Peer support programs allow the community, families and agencies to come together to play an active role in advocating for their family and their community to become stronger from within.

Family Hui Hawai'i is dedicated to strengthening families and communities, reducing violence against children, and promoting the healthy development of children, socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively, through peer to peer connection, parenting education and links to community services. Family Hui Hawai'i is a first contact provider to families with young children, prenatal-5 years serving over 1000 parents and children statewide each year. Our peer parenting support programs provide the opportunity for families to learn and grow together, sharing and helping each other through their parenting journey, discussing child development and age-appropriate effective parenting strategies, access to community resources, parental resilience and the social emotional development of their children. We see the struggles that families face every day and the difficulty they have in accessing supports and services.

HB237 allows the state to make a smart investment in the power of the people to support each other and not continually rely on institutional support. Peer to peer programs last much longer than their time in formal programs as trust is build more quickly and relationships are stronger. There is no one who understands you like a peer. Many of our

families who met in Hui as babies, continue to support each other through adolescence not only parents but the children themselves. Funds invested in peer to peer programs are investments in the community to partner with the state to be advocates for themselves, their families and each other, leveraging our collective finances into building a strong community of support.

The investment in the families of our youngest children is a needed and economically strategic use of funds. During these early years, learning and wellness is about the whole child, physically, cognitively, and social-emotionally. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Maui Wildfires have exacerbated the mental health crisis in Hawaii. Research shows that 52% of children in families with financial hardship are facing emotional distress. During these early years, learning and wellness is about the whole child, physically, cognitively, and social-emotionally. Early learning is not just in the classroom and does not begin at age 4 years at PreKindergarten. Learning is everywhere the child is – not only at school, but at home with their family. Families play a critical role in preparing their children to be successful in school and life. They are the constant in the many learning environments that their children will experience as they grow. It is important to have an easy access point for families to receive information about their child's whole growth and development.

Prevention strategies building family resilience, social and concrete supports, parenting and early childhood development knowledge are proven to alter the outcomes of early adversity, reducing overall family stress and increasing wellbeing. Funding to provide peer to peer support programs will provide a critical step in building a strong system for supporting our children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for HB237. I urge you to move this bills forward.

Respectfully,



Cherilyn Shiinoki
Executive Director

Date: February 20th, 2025

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Krysanne Rodriguez, Parent Leader & Big Island Resident

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honorable members of the House Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent of two nonverbal autistic children writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs. Family Hui Hawaii's parent support groups helped me in my parenting journey by bringing my community members together and I was able to talk with other parents. I heard the stress of parenting other parents felt and I realized I'm not alone, feeling the same way. It's easier for my mental health to know there are other parents that know what I'm going through because they've been there too. I was able to heal my thoughts and emotions of my parenting journey. I've gained knowledge within other parents' stories and their parenting styles.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.



To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Friday, February 21, 2025, 2:00 p.m., Conference Room 308

RE: **HB237 HD1 Relating to Peer Support Programs**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of the **HB237 HD1**. This measure appropriates funds for the Family Health Services Division of the Department of Health to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs for children from birth to age five and their families, including the establishment of two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) program specialist positions.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare appreciates the whole-person care approach of this measure, acknowledging that children and families, especially those experiencing health and socioeconomic challenges, require a compassionate and holistic approach to care. Peer-to-peer support is an evidence-based practice that has been shown to have numerous positive health outcomes, improving access to care, the overall quality of life, and utilization of services.¹

Peer support specialists can offer the unique perspective built on their lived experience of navigating the same systems and issues as their patients. Peer to peer support offers hope, demonstrates resiliency, and supports the healing that many cultures and communities have relied upon for ages and continue to utilize. The work is already done in our communities, however much of it is delivered in grassroots, unpaid methods by friends and neighbors.

¹ [Peer Support: Research and Reports | Mental Health America](#)



AlohaCare is proud to have established peer support positions and currently employs two full-time certified peer specialists within the Behavioral Health program. Their support has touched nearly 200 of our members this past year and has resulted in many of those members taking a more active role in their treatment and recovery. The establishment of increased peer-to-peer support programs will serve to recognize the unique skills and experience these individuals bring to the table and will further develop our healthcare and social service workforce.

In 2024 Governor Green signed Executive Order 24-01, declaring that “all Executive State Departments will collectively move towards becoming a trauma informed state by implementing evidence-based services based on the Trauma-Informed Task Force’s framework, to mitigate and respond to secondary traumatic stress and build resilience in children, adults, and communities.”² The Trauma Informed Task Force was established in 2021 by the passage of Act 209, declaring that “adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress is an emerging public health issue for Hawai‘i, and that cultural and asset-based approaches may be a resource for our community’s resiliency.”³ Peer support is one of the fundamental principles and action items integrated into the Trauma Informed Task Force’s framework and recommendations.

AlohaCare appreciates the Governor and Legislature for their efforts to create a trauma-informed state. Establishing peer-to-peer support programs through DOH is a prudent next step in this effort. This measure will give our youngest keiki, their families, and most vulnerable populations the necessary support and resources to navigate the various health and socioeconomic challenges that arise for our communities.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of the **HB237 HD1**.

² governor.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2402065.pdf

³

health.hawaii.gov/opppd/files/2024/03/23_Trauma-Informed-Care-Taskforce-Recommendations-Report.FINAL.pdf



Date: February 20, 2025

To: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Committee

From: Micah A. Kāne, Chief Executive Officer & President

RE: Testimony in Support for HB 237 HD 1, Relating to Peer Support Programs
Date: Friday, February 21, 2025 at 2:00pm
Place: Hearing Room 308

The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **supports** House Bill 237 HD 1 (HB 237) relating to Peer Support Programs. The bill would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs. This has the potential to provide concrete aid to families through peer-to-peer programs which have proven to be an effective strategy, especially for families experiencing parenting, mental health or substance use challenges.

HCF believes in addressing the symptoms and impacts of mental health issues for all ages and supporting families facing challenges including family violence, divorce, substance use and incarceration. Establishing peer support programs will benefit keiki and ohana in Hawai'i by improving access to care, providing proven peer-to-peer support, and saving state funds on future interventions that would be more costly. HCF supports HB 237 because it relates to efforts coordinated by HCF: First, the [Promising Minds](#) initiative focused on improving mental health of keiki ages 0-5 and their families; and second, the [Health and Wellness sector of the CHANGE Framework](#) which HCF has adopted and implements through key partnerships. The approach in the Health and Wellness sector recognizes the need for preventative health and widespread uptake of trauma-informed approaches.

Please advance HB 237.



Date: February 20, 2025

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health, dba AIMH HI
Re: Strong Support **HB237, Relating to Peer Support Programs**

The first 1,000 days after birth are critical in establishing brain connections, relationship patterns, and laying the foundation for future development. **AIMH HI stands on the vision that "infant mental health is everyone's kuleana"** – and peer support programs enable the community to step in, lead with experience and partnership, to aid parents in feeling less alone and isolated.

AIMH HI strongly supports the passage of House Bill 237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs. Relationship based programs and interventions, such as peer support programs, are critical in the development of optimal mental health and well-being of young children, as they provide avenues of support to families in one of the most difficult transitions of life – bringing a new baby home.

Peer support programs have made incredible advancements in other areas of mental and behavioral health, and the benefits outweigh the cost. This type of care may be viewed as "care matching," where the provider has similar cultural and lived experience as the participant. Care matching leads to higher levels of trust, engagement, and communication – all which indicate higher efficacy of services, which then leads to a better return on investment.

Our association's role in the early childhood space is to "hold the hands of those who hold the hands of babies" – knowing that when the parents around young children are steady, the children can then have steady growth and development.

We urge you to move **House Bill 237** forward to ensure these programs are available to the wider community.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E©
Executive Director, Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 5:38:56 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sade Kahue	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To:

Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair, Representative Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Health

Representative Lisa Marten, Chair, Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

From: **Sade Kahue**

Mahalo to the Chairs, Vice Chairs, and committee members of the Committee on Health and on Human Services & Homelessness for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent *two 3 keiki and* writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 8:41:53 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Godwin Higa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Godwin Higa

Trauma-Informed and Restorative Justice Consultant

Member, Trauma-Informed Task Force Committee

[4666 Aldine Drive, San Diego, CA 92115](#)

[February 3, 2025](#)

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill HB237, a peer-to-peer support program that offers a vital lifeline for parents and families navigating similar parenting, mental health, and substance addiction challenges. By connecting individuals with lived experience, these programs foster higher rates of trust, program retention, and ongoing support.

These programs provide a safe space for parents and families to receive guidance on best parenting practices, access necessary screenings and referrals, and connect with critical resources. The positive impact on families and children can not be overstated.

HB237 is essential for ensuring our youths and parents are receiving the best care and attention needed to support all youths in Hawaii.

As a Trauma-Informed and restorative justice consultant, I firmly believe that continuous peer-to-peer support programs are essential in this fast moving issues that Hawaii youths and families are currently experiencing. A positive, trauma-informed environment that supports the well-being of Hawaii youths and families is critical.

HB237 are a critical steps in initiating the healing process and promoting effective communication among all stakeholders for the sake of Hawaii's youth and families suffering from various mental health issue's especially the trauma and toxic stress our youth and families are experiencing daily.

I urge you to pass Bill HB237, which will provide a vital framework for supporting Hawaii's most vulnerable populations.

Mahalo, for considering my perspective.

Sincerely,

Godwin Higa

Current member of the Trauma-Informed practices State of Hawaii task force committee.

SD Human Relations Commissioner 8 years

SD Citizens Review Board on Police Practices 8 years

SD Gang Prevention and Intervention Commissioner current 2 years

I strongly support the passage of House Bill 237, which would allocate funding to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs for parents and families. I recently retired as Executive Director of EPIC `Ohana, and I am proud of our Makua Allies Program. The Makua Allies Program provides, through a contract with the Department of Health peer support specialist services to women who are pregnant and experiencing substance use disorder.

In 2023 the Mālama `Ohana Working Group was established to develop recommendations to establish a child welfare system that is trauma-informed, sustains a community-based partnership, and responds to the needs of children and families in the system and the community. I serve as Co-Chair of the working group. The working group has completed its work and a full copy of the report can be found at www.malamaohana.net, however the working group is still subject to sunshine law until adjournment sine die. To be clear, the working group will not be making further decisions now that the report has been filed. The working group may meet during the session to provide information to the public about its report but will not make further decisions. Therefore, it is not allowed under sunshine law that more than two of us meet to discuss the report, or next steps. Therefore, I am testifying as a concerned citizen and speaking for the content of the report that was approved by the working group.

Many of the recommendations in our report include peer support because it improves engagement, it improves outcomes. During our community listening sessions throughout the state we heard from several women who had experienced perinatal substance use disorder and appreciated the help and support of a peer support specialist. Their stories give us hope. I remember speaking with one woman who had several of her children removed at birth in the hospital. But now she is in treatment, and she is successfully keeping her baby.

The other critical element to a successful program for perinatal substance use disorder is the pairing of services with infant mental health services. This is a two-generation approach working with both mother and baby. In this way programs like these avoid "adverse childhood effects" (ACES) for the baby that can have a lifetime improvement in outcomes.

We are grateful for your support of the families and children in the child welfare system, and your efforts to find ways to improve the system.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 8:56:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linee Reeves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 237, which aims to establish and fund peer-to-peer support programs for families with children from birth to age five. This initiative, overseen by the Family Health Services Division of the Department of Health, is a critical step toward enhancing the well-being of our youngest residents and their families.

Supporting HB237 is an investment in the future of Hawaii’s families and communities. By empowering parents and caregivers through peer support, we are building healthy foundation for our children to thrive.

Mahalo for considering my testimony. I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB237.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 9:08:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aurora O'Brien	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and

Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Aurora O'Brien

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honored members of the Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent of three boys, and we live on the westside of Oahu. I believe that this bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. It really does take a village to raise a child.

I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 9:24:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
johanna nielsen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and

Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Johanna Nielsen

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honored members of the Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent of 2 boys from Honolulu writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs. I joined Family Hui Hawai'i's peer-to-peer parent support group, Neighborhood Hui (Hui), in 2016. In Hui I met a great group of moms plus their babies. Moms in my Hui group came from all walks of life, from a military wife, to educator, to hairdresser, and restaurant manager. We were so different yet we could find similarities and friendship by being a mom/parent and our babies.

This group gave me the outlet I needed as a first time parent, encouraging me to get out of the house with a baby, and giving me the opportunity to develop friendships with other parents just like me. Becoming a parent was almost like learning a new language in a new country, ultimately having to figure out life from scratch. No one, not even a book, prepared me enough for life with a newborn baby. Yet women give birth and 2-days later parents are expected to go home and know how to handle it all. I certainly didn't!

In Hui we talked about our new life with a baby, the challenges, and joys we were finding. I found that the situations I was going through wasn't just unique to me, but that there are Moms who are also going through similar experiences too. We explored what our challenges looked like, from what our realities were versus the expectations we had, breast/bottle feeding to starting solids, safety and medical issues, developmental milestones, sleepless nights, discipline, and just the ability to even manage brushing our own teeth. Most importantly, we learned from each other by reflecting on who we are as parents, what parenting looks and feels like, and hopes of what it could be like in the future.

In my Hui, I felt validated as I shared - I could talk and others would listen, empathize with me, and truly understand what I was going through. I gained new perspectives, new strategies/tips, and felt a sense of belonging with my Hui Moms, helping me to become a better and more confident parent for my own children. Even though I have a husband, I was and still continue to be, the primary caregiver for my children, carrying the most of the mental load of being a parent. Similarly, the moms in my Hui were also experiencing the same, and Hui gave us the chance to gather, share, connect, learn, and support one another during our children's first year of life.

From Hui, I gained 2 really good friends who I continue to regularly keep in touch with that have supported myself and my children over the past 9 years. In 2023, my husband was unexpectedly diagnosed with a grade 2 astrocytoma (brain cancer). He was rushed into surgery after a small seizure and an MRI discovered his tumor. One of my Hui friends took in my children as I stayed by my husband's side during the entire hospital stay. She has also helped me with child care and transportation to/from school for my children during 2 additional brain surgeries my husband had to go through in 2024.

I have very little assistance from my family for support. Without my Hui friends, I don't know how I would have been able to get through it all - support my husband during his medical surgeries and countless doctor visits, plus take care of my children and their transportation and educational needs, or myself, my peace of mind, and well being. They gave me the support I needed when I needed it the most.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Johanna Nielsen

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 9:28:19 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honored members of the Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health’s Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent of two college aged children in Kailua and am writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs. When my son, who is now 21 years old, was a newborn baby my husband deployed just 6 days after he was born. I was a new parent, had no family in Hawai'i, and was suffering from severe postpartum depression. A good friend strongly recommended that I join what was then Baby Hui. Little did I know that this group of parents would literally save mine and my son's life. The moms in my Hui were my anchor during this overwhelming time in my life of being a new parent who was parenting alone. The connections and support I received from this group were exactly what my son and I needed to not only survive but thrive during those critical first months of his life. To this day I remain close friends with the women in my Hui. They became and will always be Ohana. I know that the peer support, learning, and connection Family Hui provides works because I have experienced the benefit first hand.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.
Mahalo for your consideration.

Date: February 20th, 2025

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Leina`ala Henriques

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honored members of the Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I was born and raised in Hawai`i and am a parent of two children who I'm raising in Kona, on Hawai`i Island. I am writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs through the passage of House Bill 237. Raising children in an underserved, rural community, I know how hard it is to find help, support and basic services. I suffered from postpartum depression with both of my children and felt isolated, lonely and overwhelmed. What saved my life was a small playgroup that is no longer being offered in my community.

I have worked in the non-profit, human services field since the early 2000's in different capacities. Because of my personal hardships this work is very meaningful to me. I am currently a program coordinator with Family Hui Hawai`i and it is the most meaningful work I have done. This work means I am fostering connection that goes beyond what I am able to do for families as an individual. It is more important and more impactful than me trying to solve a parents problems. Parents are consistently saying that they are thankful for our peer led parent support groups that help with connecting to other parents, creating a modern day village and finding understanding support through their peers. Everytime I get to witness that connection it's a very special thing and I just wish more parents could get this support.

This bill provides the necessary support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 10:05:01 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Hill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Victoria Hill

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honorable members of the House Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent of two young daughters in Mo'ili'ili, writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

To: Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Leilani Novak

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honored members of the Committee on Finance for hearing HB237 HD1, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am honored to provide testimony **in strong support** of funding for peer-to-peer support programs for families. Through my work at Family Hui Hawaii, I have been able to witness the true benefits of peer to peer support programs as a critical lifeline to families navigating complex challenges, providing emotional support, shared knowledge, and practical guidance that only those with lived experience can offer.

Peer-to-peer support programs empower families by connecting them with trained peers who have faced similar situations. This connection fosters a sense of community, reduces isolation, and promotes mental well-being. Research consistently shows that families who engage in peer support experience lower stress levels, improved coping mechanisms, and better long-term outcomes reducing the risks of adverse childhood experiences. Furthermore, these programs often prevent crises, reducing the need for more costly interventions and alleviating the burden on other public services.

The financial investment in peer-to-peer support programs yields substantial returns both short term and long term. By facilitating early intervention and providing accessible support, these programs reduce the reliance on crisis services, improve educational outcomes for children, and strengthen family stability. This proactive approach leads to cost savings across healthcare, social services, and the judicial system.

I urge the committee to prioritize sustained funding for peer-to-peer support programs. Continued investment ensures that families facing hardships have access to the resources and community they need to thrive. By supporting these programs, we are not only aiding individual families but also fostering healthier, more resilient communities for our future generations.

I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 10:16:17 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily Santiago	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honorable members of the House Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health’s Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.,

Mahalo for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health’s Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

As a mother of a single mother and an active caregiver to my two young granddaughters, ages 3 and 4, I strongly support the establishment of peer-to-peer support programs. In the past, I had the opportunity to participate in a peer-to-peer support group funded by my employer. The connections I made with other caregivers, along with the valuable resources and education I received, made the challenges of grandparenting much more manageable.

This bill will provide essential support for parents, allowing them to learn together, share resources, and build their confidence. By investing in peer-to-peer programs, you are prioritizing the mental health and well-being of parents—ultimately benefiting their children and strengthening families in our community.

I urge you to support HB237 and help ensure families have access to the support they need.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 10:23:16 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Choy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From:

Rachel Jing Han Choy, MEd in Teaching and MSCP in MFT

Mahalo to the Chair, Vice Chair, and honorable members of the House Committee on Finance for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a parent (*add in personal descriptors ex. of two boys from Kalihi*) writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 10:50:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leanne Poffenbarger	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. It is soo important for our Keiki to have the opportunity to be able to help encourage one another. Peer to peer support is so critical & uplifting to have for our Keiki to come together to strengthen one another. It is difficult to find that village, the right influences as adults, to get through our everyday challenges. If our Keiki can create bonds to help strengthen there voice, or confidence, that is the strength they learn to rely on one another. That is a win all on its own. Please help us be able to give our next generation of Keiki the empowerment to support one another & to be able to support it without paying a price. I know we will do the right thing to support our Keiki financially, mentally, physically & cost free! Please pass this bill to help our Keiki flourish into amazing, Akamai people of our community. As individuals with self respect and awareness of their lives. Peer to peer support will help them succeed.
Mahalo Nui, Leanne Poffenbarger

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 11:33:57 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Mundon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my **strong support for HB 237**, which seeks to expand and strengthen peer support services. As someone with lived experience navigating various systems—both personally and professionally—I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of peer support.

Throughout my life, I have encountered the challenges that many individuals face when seeking help, whether due to mental health struggles, substance use recovery, family instability, or navigating social services. I also work as a licensed social worker, and in my professional capacity, I have seen how peer support specialists provide critical guidance, empathy, and encouragement that traditional services often lack. Peer support fosters trust, builds resilience, and empowers individuals in ways that clinical interventions alone cannot achieve.

HB 237 is crucial because it recognizes the invaluable role of peer support in our communities. It ensures that individuals with lived experience are not only acknowledged but also integrated into the care continuum as essential resources for those in need. By investing in peer support programs, we are fostering a system that is more accessible, person-centered, and effective in helping individuals achieve long-term stability and success.

I urge you to **pass HB 237** and help ensure that peer support remains a vital, funded, and recognized component of our behavioral health and social service systems. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Amanda Mundon

HB 237 - Relating to Peer Support Groups

Kyle Yamashita (FIN Chair) and Jenni Takenouchi (FIN Vice Chair)

Finance (FIN)

Friday, February 21, 2025 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room: 308

IN SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and committee members, my name is Shayna and I am a Bachelors of Social Work student at the UH Manoa Thompson School of Social Work. I am testifying in favor of House Bill 237.

I support this bill because peer support groups have shown to be helpful for parents and children learning, sharing resources, and building self confidence. It is also an instant and cost effective safety net. This bill addresses the issue of child abuse and neglect in Hawaii. The bill mentions that there are about 600 cases of child abuse and neglect in Hawaii each year. If peer support groups are an instant safety net as mentioned, this will tremendously help the children and parents that are at risk of being separated from each other. It will also limit the trauma from families being separated. As someone that eventually wants to work in child and family social work, I think it is important for children to stay with their families and educate parents instead of separating families. These support programs will help families with similar issues support one another and lessen the strain on intervention methods.

The Parents Anonymous Organization has helped combat child abuse and neglect through the use of peer support. The national clearing house of foster care prevention programs ranked Parents Anonymous as “promising”, which is the second highest rank on a four-point scale evaluating its evidence based.

California’s statewide clearing house also rated the support groups as promising in effectively preventing child abuse and neglect. Also, more than 4.5 million parents, caregivers, and their children nationwide have participated since going virtual after the pandemic.

In closing, I support this bill and hope that peer-to-peer support programs will continue to help more families and children in the future. Thank you for your time.

Shayna Au

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 2:05:35 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
daniel goya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Daniel Goya. I was a public/private school educator for 15 years. I also have worked for a Native Hawaiian non-profit for 13 years, creating a nationally accredited and recognized homeless 2Gen preschool and a 12-bed residential facility for adjudicated youth ages 13-17 that is an alternative to youth incarceration. I have seen the effects of trauma and how it is passed through generations. I am submitting testimony to express my strong support for HB237. I have seen first-hand how peer support as a protective factor can mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and prevent new ACEs from impacting children and families.

HB237 is an essential bill because it is a trauma-informed care approach to helping families in need. It will establish a trauma-informed care task force within the department of health to make recommendations of trauma-informed care in the State of Hawai'i. Peer-to-peer support programs connect parents and/or families with other parents and/or families who have experienced similar parenting, mental health, and/or substance addiction challenges. This results in higher rates of trust, program retention and ongoing support. Peer-to-peer support programs provide parents and families with a safe place to support on best parenting practices, obtain necessary screening and referrals, and access critical resources. The positive effect this can have for families and children cannot be overstated. And—with 58% of children in Hawai'i already made vulnerable by family violence, substance abuse, divorce, and incarceration—the need for social programs like the one proposed by HB237 should not be underestimated.

Mahalo,

Danny Goya

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: **Kathleen O'Dell, PhD**

Mahalo to the Chairs, Vice Chairs, and committee members of the Committee on Health and on Human Services & Homelessness for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am writing in strong support of peer-to-peer support programs. I am a parent to two grown children who I raised largely as a single mom. I wish I had the kind of programs that organizations like Family Hui Hawai'i established and oversees to provide peer-peer support when I was raising my children. Not a day went by that I didn't question my parenting and I often felt the need for advice and assistance but didn't know where to turn. When we feel vulnerable about our capacity and capabilities as parents, we want to be in a safe place to share with others who we feel can relate to what we are going through at the time.

This bill provides the needed support parents need to learn together, share resources, and build their self-confidence. By supporting peer-to-peer programs, you prioritize parents' mental health and well-being, which directly benefits their children in a positive way. I hope you can help support families through this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Kathleen O'Dell, PhD

Date: February 20th, 2025

To:

Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Carrie Barringer

Mahalo for hearing HB237, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs.

I am a military spouse, a mother of five boys, and work for an organization that plans and delivers family strengthening programs for Hawai'i families. I am writing in strong support of peer-to-peer programs.

As a peer-to-peer to Family Programs Coordinator, I see the impact that peer-to-peer parenting and family support has on families each and every day. Families frequently share feedback including, "My participation in the group changed my life, encouraged me to become a parent leader within my own community, and/or made a world of difference for both myself and my keiki." I also hear, "I wish there were more programs like this one near to me and I would love for this program to be longer than it was." These comments make it clear that Hawai'i's families value peer-to-peer support and that they would like greater access to similar programs.

Peer-to-peer support programs have also been a lifeline of connection and support for my own family. My husband and I participated in Baby Hui after the birth of two of our children. As a military spouse in Hawai'i, I initially felt alone as a new parent, living far from extended family. However, for us, Hui introduced us to a community of people with shared experience, knowledge of meaningful resources, and interest in supporting other families. Later, when our younger children were in preschool, we rediscovered Family Hui and again found instant community.

From a financial perspective, I see the cost-effective approach of peer-to-peer support as one that keeps families from needing to turn to more expensive state and federal aid. Often, the buck literally stops within the context of peer-to-peer programs. Furthermore, the initial money spent on these programs has a great ripple effect, benefiting both parents/caregivers and the children in their care. As strong families build strong communities, the relationships built, information shared, and compassion shown through peer-to-peer support often goes on to impact our community as a whole.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Karen Worthington, Kula, HI 96790

February 20, 2025

To: Chair Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Committee Members
House Committee on Finance

From: Karen Worthington, Private Citizen

Re: **HB 237 HD1: Relating to Peer Support Programs**
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 308 and Videoconference, February 21, 2025,
2:00pm

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 237 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Health's Family Health Services Division to establish and oversee peer-to-peer support programs. This bill would enable the development of structured support networks where individuals with lived experience can provide guidance and assistance to parents and families navigating similar challenges, particularly in areas of substance use recovery and mental health.

My name is Karen Worthington, and I am a children's law and policy attorney with a consulting business on Maui, Karen Worthington Consulting. I have worked as a lawyer in and around state systems affecting children and families throughout my 30-year career, including working directly with peer support initiatives. I have worked extensively with Hawai'i state departments and nonprofit organizations that support children and families who exist at the margins of our society.

Please pass HB 237 HD1, and include the following expenditures, effective July 1, 2025:

- \$200,000 for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) program specialist V position and one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) program specialist IV position;
- \$270,000 for purchase of service contracts with neighborhood or location peer-to-peer based groups; and
- \$390,000 for purchase of service contracts for addiction and child welfare peer support programs.

In my research and in my work with state agencies and nonprofits, I have seen how peer support programs increase parent and child well-being, reduce the risks of child abuse and neglect, and increase the likelihood of positive health activities and outcomes such as abstaining from alcohol and drugs, caring for one's mental and physical health, and engaging in positive parenting practices. Importantly, peer-to-peer helps parents access needed services and resources, reducing stressors which negatively impact parenting.

Karen Worthington, Kula, HI 96790

Expanding and supporting peer support programs is recommended in the DOH ADAD State Plan (See: "ADAD State Plan System of Care Implications Full Volume," Department of Health Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division, December 2022, https://health.hawaii.gov/substance-abuse/files/2022/12/ADAD-State-Plan-System-of-Care-Implications-Full-Volume_print.pdf). The Mālama‘Ohana Working Group also emphasizes this need in their Final Report, especially for mothers struggling with substance use disorder (See: "Final Report," Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group, 2024, <https://www.malamaohana.net/mowg-final-report>).

I urge you to pass HB 237 HD1. If you would like additional information related to my testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at karen@karenworthington.com.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Worthington". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Karen Worthington

HB-237-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 6:16:55 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiana Kauwe	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

RE: Testimony in Support of HB237 – Establishing and Expanding Peer-Support Programs

Aloha Chair(s) and Members of the Committees,

My name is Kiana Kauwe, and I am a long-time DOE elementary school teacher and early childhood educator. I am currently at home caring for my one-year-old daughter, and through this transition, I have come to understand more deeply the critical role that peer support plays in the well-being of parents and caregivers. I strongly urge you to support HB237, which seeks to establish and expand peer-support programs—an investment that will benefit not only parents and caregivers but also, most importantly, our keiki.

Research consistently demonstrates the profound impact that caregiver mental well-being has on child development. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, children thrive when their caregivers have access to social connections, emotional support, and stress-buffering resources (Harvard University, 2015). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) also recognizes that parental mental health is a crucial determinant of child outcomes, highlighting that depression, anxiety, and isolation among caregivers can negatively affect children's social-emotional and cognitive development (AAP, 2019). Peer-support programs provide families with community, creating relationships and support. We are investing in a stronger foundation for our children’s future by investing in peer support programs.

On a personal level, I have experienced firsthand the power of peer support programs. Becoming a mother at home all day with my baby, I needed connection with others who could relate to my experience. I found connection, encouragement, and solidarity with Family Hui Hawaii groups. Joining a baby yoga hui supported both my mental and physical well-being and was fun for both my baby and me! This hui connected me with other new mamas experiencing the same transition into motherhood.

HB237 will ensure that more families across Hawai‘i have access to these critical support systems. If you support young children, then you support their families and parents. If you support parents and families, you support this bill that establishes and expands peer support programs.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to pass HB237 for the well-being of our keiki, families, and communities.

Mahalo nui loa,

Kiana Kauwe